

Life in South Moor

With no welfare state or National Health Service to act as a safety net, miners relied on their community in time of need. The colliery viewer's report of 1912 highlighted the dangers facing over 4,000 employees at South Moor. In a single year 826 accidents were reported to the colliery surgeon and 653 of these caused disability for at least seven days.

Luckily for Herbert Pentney, the people of South Moor got behind him when he was unable to work and organised a benefit concert.

"A choice concert for a really most deserving object is to be given at the Arcadia Picture Palace, South Moor, on Monday evening next on behalf of Herbert Pentney, who has been unable to follow his employment at the Hedley Pit for 25 weeks, and has undergone several operations in Newcastle Infirmary for appendicitis and other complaints. Mr Pentney, who lives at 100 Poplar Street, has many friends who should now rally to his support in the time of trouble. Mr Oxley has kindly lent Arcadia, and a first-class programme has been arranged" Stanley News, 17 January 1918

South Moor miners and their union, the Durham Miners' Association, were an important political force. They campaigned for and achieved better conditions for miners and their families, such as the Eight Hour Day in 1910 and compulsory mine safety improvements in 1911. A miners' welfare levy in 1922 enabled the South Moor and Craghead welfare hospital to open.

Elm Street was the scene of a tragic accident in 1912. Robert Oxley, a stonemason, had been keeping 21 pounds of explosive powder in his house. He had been repeatedly instructed by the charge-man to bring the powder in, and at last decided to take it to the colliery magazine. Some of the powder was dropped on the kitchen floor and broke into pieces when it fell. This was swept up by his daughter and placed in his hands. When Oxley foolishly threw the pieces into the fire a terrific explosion resulted, igniting the whole of the powder in the room. Oxley, his five year old granddaughter and an old woman named Forsythe, who was in the house at the time, all died.

South Moor colliery offices, at the end of Maple Street and Lime Street, built in 1906 on original plans and reconstructed before 1914.



South Moor Victory Street party, 1919 (courtesy of the Stanley Museum)



New South Moor on the 1920 Ordnance Survey map

Peace celebrations

When the Armistice was declared the 'unrestrained and infectious merrymaking' reported by the Stanley News was tempered by the blight of Spanish 'flu, which had already closed the South Moor schools, and the absence of the many men who had died or were still serving in the forces.

Following the government announcement of a public celebration in 1919 Stanley Urban District Council planned three days of festivities, one day for the children, an 'old folks' day and a day for the sailors and soldiers. Eleven days before Peace Day on 19 July 1919 politics intervened and the council decided to boycott the celebrations as a protest against British Military involvement against Soviet Russia. A hastily formed public committee stepped in to take over arrangements and in less than a week had raised £600 to ensure that 1,000 'old folks' and 600 children had a good time. There was much support after the war for the new socialist Soviet state. Streets of new council bungalows in South Stanley were named after Lenin, Marx and Engels.



Vladimir Ilych Lenin

South Moor Co-op, opposite Maple Street, opened on 18 August 1900 (photo courtesy of the Stanley Museum, 1900-1901)



South Moor station bus, owned by Mr. Whitfield of Stanley (courtesy of the Stanley Museum)



South Moor Heritage Trail

South Moor and Quaking Houses were typical colliery villages that developed before and just after the First World War, around four collieries of William Hedley's South Moor Colliery Company.

South Moor Heritage trail is a five mile circular walk around key eight heritage sites of South Moor and Quaking Houses that existed during or soon after the First World War. Each site is marked by an interpretation board detailing the significance and heritage of the site. Each interpretation board is linked via a QR code to a South Moor heritage website providing further information about the history of the site. Rights of way between the eight sites along the trail are marked by 'way markers' to keep you on the right path.

Over two hundred miners from South Moor and Quaking Houses were killed in the First World War. Their names are engraved at the gates of the First World War Memorial Park. The Heritage Trail marks the former colliery houses in which they lived with a fallen soldier plaque - can you find them in the colliery terraces?



Colliery house, built in 1906, now a private residence



The Billy Pit (also known as the Billy and the Billy Pit)



The Hedley Pit (also known as the Hedley and the Hedley Pit)



South Moor Co-op, built in 1900, now a private residence